

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

RLS

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is RLS. My date of birth is 1966. My contact details are known to the Inquiry. I was previously married and known by the surname RLS. My name in care was RLS.

Life before going into care

2. I am the oldest child born to my parents and . My parents were eighteen years old when they had me. My sister was born three years after me. Then my twin brothers, and were born three years after that. That meant that by the time my mum and dad were twenty-five years old they had four children.
3. I was born in Govan and most of my time was spent living in Govanhill. My granny lived close by to us. My sister and I went to Victoria Primary School which was close to where we lived.
4. My dad worked in the Govan shipbuilders and my mum stayed at home to look after us. We lived in a tenement with one single bedroom and a toilet on the landing. My sister and I slept on a couch in the kitchen/living room part, my parents in the bed recess and my brothers in a pull-down bed in the living room. There were no baths and we had to get washed in the sink.

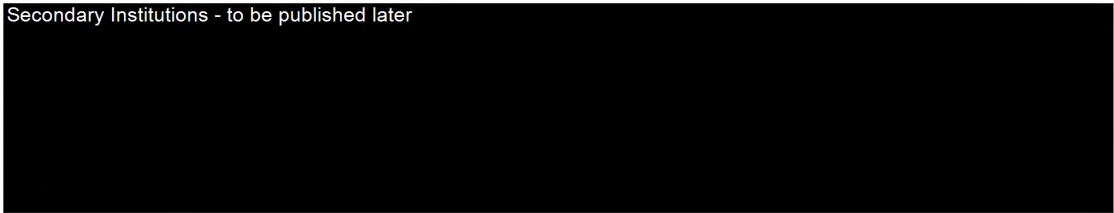
5. Life was alright, my dad would take a wee drink at the weekend and go out with his brothers but generally life was okay.
6. My brothers were quite boisterous and into everything so me and my sister stayed with my granny and grandad a lot. We also only had the one bedroom. My granny and grandad spoiled us and took my sister and I on holidays to Saltcoats to give my mum a break.

Unknown care establishment

7. When I was about five years old, I was placed in a residential home. It was just me that went as my sister was too young. I think the purpose was to give my mum a break and I believe it was organised through the school. I stayed for about six weeks.
8. I cannot recall the name of the place. I think it was in Perthshire, though I do also remember going out of the big gates of the place and it was across from a beach, so I'm not really sure. At first, I had thought it was Rossie but then that would have involved going on a boat and I don't remember that.

9.  Secondary Institutions - to be published later
10. 

11.



12. I believe I was only there for six weeks. Afterwards, I went home and everything went back to normal and I returned to my primary school, life continued.

13. When I was six or seven years old, a traumatic incident happened to me. I was waiting on my friends coming out of school in [REDACTED] when a man came up to me. He asked me if I knew somebody. I told him no. He then asked me to check in a close nearby. I told him I wasn't allowed to. The next thing I knew he had dragged me into a close and into an empty house with him. He had a big pair of scissors and he held them at my eyes and told me he was going to cut my eyes out. He put his feet on the door and I was locked in with him. I was sobbing my heart out and he told me to stop crying.

14. All of the houses in that tenement were empty and the building was directly opposite my own tenement. Luckily enough someone came in the close and I heard voices, it turned out to be my pal and her mammy coming home from school. She must have heard me sobbing and started banging on the door. The door flew open and he ran out the back. My pal then took me up to my mum. I think I may have been with the man for 10 or 20 minutes, but I cannot be sure, it seemed forever.

15. The police were involved and I got taken to the hospital to see if anything had happened to me. I don't remember anything happening to me, I just thought he had me standing against the wall with these scissors and that something would have happened if my friend and her mum hadn't heard me. My mum however has said that when she went to the hospital and after I was examined down there, they think there was some sort of penetration. My memory is that my trousers were on and it was just my button that was open. I really don't know. My friends mum also said that she saw me lying on the floor, but I don't remember that either. I just remember her standing at the door.

16. Although I had never seen the man before, apparently a neighbour had seen him in the street earlier. I can still describe him. He had a sheepskin jacket with black trousers and black shoes. He had longish shoulder length hair and he was in his 20's.
17. After what happened to me, I definitely became very quiet and withdrawn and I thought the man was going to be everywhere. One day I was at the bus stop with my mum and I was sure he was behind me, he wasn't, but I just froze.
18. My mum was told by the police to not ever talk about it with me again and that I would forget about it. I never did though. I tried to. Going into my thirties and forties I started to think about it again. I think when things happen in life you put everything in a cupboard in your head and forget about it. But then something happens. I think it was the disappearance of Madeline McCann which made me think that could have been me. The 'cupboard' then flies open and you start thinking about stuff again.
19. Not so long ago I tried to get police and medical records so I could get closure on it. My doctors got back and said my medical records only went back as far as 1975. I had wanted to get the hospital notes to see what they said. I did see three letters within the notes from 1975 which said I had a urinary infection. It did make me question how a little girl of nine years old would have urine infections. This was just before I went to Fornethy, about two or three years after the incident.
20. The police told me their records would be in the archives.
21. As a result, I have no closure to the incident or any idea of what actually happened. Maybe I don't want to remember it because it was bad. I dread to think what might have happened if someone hadn't heard me, I might not even have been here today to talk about it.
22. That incident all happened in between the two residential places I went to.

Fornethy Residential School, Kilry, Blairgowrie

23. I went to Fornethy in [REDACTED] 1976, I was nine years old. I know this as I recently had a conversation with my mum and she told me we all moved to Castlemilk in 1976. I left for Fornethy from my old house in Govanhill and on my return my family were living in Castlemilk.
24. My mum was asked by my school if myself and my sister wanted to go Fornethy. I think my sister was about six years old. It was sold as a break for my mum and a holiday for us. I told my sister it would be great as they had a school and they had this, that and the next thing. [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later
[REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later
25. My granny and grandad took [REDACTED] and I up to Buchanan Street in Glasgow for the bus to Fornethy. We had our wee suitcases and my mum had been given a list of things we were to take.
26. We boarded a bus and were all taken together and everyone was waving at their relatives. We were all happy and we were singing.
27. When we got there, I realised it wasn't the same place I had been to previously. Fornethy was a white, horrible looking building, with small windows and plain curtains. It was like something out of a horror movie. [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later
[REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later
28. It was all girls at Fornethy and I think there must have been about thirty girls in total. The girls were all primary age, from about five up to twelve years old.
29. The building had two floors and the dormitories were upstairs. There were five or six dormitories that slept about six girls in each. On the ground floor there was a cloakroom with coat hooks and wooden boxes that contained wellington boots for the walks. There was a dining room with round tables. The corridors on the ground floor were painted with cartoons.

Routine at Fornethy Residential School, Kilry, Blairgowrie

First day

30. When we got off the bus we went into the corridor of the building and from there it was hell. The doors got slammed and the staff started shouting, "Get into two's", "Take hands," and things like that. It was hell from that day on.
31. We were taken to a big room which I think was the dining room and told we were going to get split up into dormitories. I got to stay with my sister as she was still really small, I was glad about that. She is really mouthy and still is to this day. I needed to look after her.
32. We were given a dormitory called Esk. There were six of us who slept there. My bed was right beside the door. There was a single bed and a tall locker for clothes. We used to have to put our pillow on top of the locker every morning after we had made our bed. My sister couldn't reach and I would do it for her, but I ended up getting in trouble for that. Miss Robertson, who was one the staff, seemed to look after our dormitory and perhaps another dorm.
33. They left the windows in the dormitory open from the bottom, all day and night, despite there being snow on the ground outside. This meant the dormitories were freezing all of the time. It was like a form of torture. At night my sister would shout over to me that she was freezing. I would say to her to get down under the covers and that she would be fine.
34. The member of staff that I recall most was Miss Fletcher, she was the head one and in charge of everything. She reminded me of Maggie Thatcher, she had blonde curly hair and was dead strict. She had a loud voice. Miss Robertson was the other one. I don't recall any other staff and no one else being bad to us. My sister seems to recall there being a gardener there, but I don't remember him.

Mornings and bedtime

35. I think we were woken up by staff in the morning at about 8 or 8.30am. We then made our bed. I think we were all too scared to get up before the staff came into the dormitory so that never happened. We got dressed and then went down for breakfast.
36. I don't remember what we did during the day, we were just sent out to play. There were certainly no activities like knitting or crafts or anything like that. We'd go for lunch and generally in the afternoon we went on a walk.
37. After supper it was a case of getting our nighties on and getting straight into bed. We all had to be quiet after that. I am unsure what time we went to bed.

Mealtimes/Food

38. We all ate in the dining room at the round tables. I think we were told where we had to sit. I always sat beside my sister so I could look after her.
39. You had to eat everything that was put down to you. There was a real fear in the dining room. If you didn't eat everything on your plate you were sent to stand and face the wall. There were always children standing facing the wall during mealtimes.
40. It almost made me sick having to make sure that I ate everything that was on my plate and the fear of what would happen to me if I didn't.
41. I don't remember much about the food. Breakfast was cereal and toast. At suppertime we got a drink of milk and one rich tea biscuit.

Washing/bathing

42. We showered in a shower block, like you see in the jail, with all of the sprays coming out of the wall. All ages showered together and there was no privacy. I don't recall if

we showered as a group from our dormitories or not. The staff would stand while we were showering.

Clothing/uniform

43. We wore our own clothes with the exception of the wellington boots and raincoat that we had to wear out on the walks.

Leisure time

44. I don't remember doing anything there that I liked or enjoyed. All we got to do was go out and play in the snow. There was also one swing in the grounds.
45. There was a concrete hut thing in the garden. My sister and I would play shops in that. We used grass and stones and pretended to sell them. I also used that hut to speak to my sister to tell her that she needed to be quiet as otherwise she was going to get into trouble.
46. Everyone else would just run about on their own, I think the others were too scared to make friends or talk to the others. At least I had my sister. It must have been a really lonely place for most children.
47. We did long long walks and those were cruel, because of the distance and the wellington boots we had to wear which were either too big or too small.
48. There was a library but I think that was for the staff. I don't believe there were children's books in there. I was only in it the once when my sister and I were sent there during the night to face the wall.

Schooling

49. There was no school. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

50. The only thing we did do in the classrooms was write letters home. We sat in front of a big board and on the board would be, 'Dear... , we're having a wonderful time, great place, foods lovely' and all that kind of stuff. We couldn't write what we wanted to write. They checked what we were writing but you never had a choice. I'm not aware of anyone writing anything different because we were all so scared. Everyone knew from that first week that you had to do what the staff wanted.

Healthcare / medication

51. There was no matron or anything there and no health care. My little sister went home with chicken pox. She would say to the staff when she was there that she was itchy, but they said to her it was nothing.

Work

52. We had to make our beds in the morning and place our pillows on top of the lockers beside our bed. It was quite high up and so I would do my sisters for her.
53. There would be an inspection in the morning and you'd get into trouble if your bed wasn't made correctly or the pillow wasn't up on the locker properly. It was like a military camp.
54. We also set the tables for the meals and cleared our plates to the counter area afterwards.

Personal possessions

55. We had a locker which was situated next to our bed where we kept our clothes.
56. My granny sent in magazines during my stay and I got to keep those.

Bed Wetting

57. There was a girl in our dorm who wet the bed, I don't know the girl's name. I saw Miss Robertson pull her out of the bed and whack her on the back of her legs with a slipper. This happened virtually on the first night. We were terrified after that.
58. Thankfully I didn't wet the bed and nor did my sister.

Family Contact

59. We never got visits from family while we were there. We did receive letters from family. These were handed out in the dining room.
60. A week before we were due to go home, I remember getting a letter. It said that my mum, dad and brothers were moving house. I was sobbing my heart out thinking they were leaving us in the home. I hadn't been aware before we went in there that there was a plan for us to move. I know that I felt I couldn't have gone on there for even one more week.

Discipline

61. The main punishment given out at Fornethy was being made to stand and face the wall and that was usually for not eating food at mealtimes. The other one was staff slapping children over the back of the legs with a slipper. The slipper would be used mostly when children just had their night clothes on and so there wasn't much protection on their legs from any clothing.
62. I don't think there was a day that went past without me seeing a child facing the wall.

Abuse at Fornethy Residential School, Kilry, Blairgowrie

63. One night when [REDACTED] and I were in bed, she was telling me that she was itchy. I told her to be quiet as we would get into trouble. I don't know if staff stood outside of the dorms to listen but sure enough, Miss Robertson came into the room. The pair of us were taken out of bed with just our night shirts on, we didn't even get a chance to put on our slippers. We were dragged along a corridor and put into a room like a cupboard. I vaguely recall it might have been a library as it had books on each side with a ladder thing. We were made to stand in there and face the wall at the back. I remember the room and the corridors, they were so black. I think it was the middle of the night. Robertson came back in at some point and gave us both a serving spoon size of castor oil which we had to swallow. She left again and we were locked in the room. I don't really know how long it was for and I have no idea where she went. I would guess it was about half an hour, though it seemed like forever. When you're young it's difficult to say how long. She then came back and dragged us back to our beds. I think this happened quite near the end of our stay, maybe a week or two before we left because my sister had chicken pox on our return home.
64. Miss Fletcher would shout and bawl at all of us in the dining hall and basically everywhere we were. I would always be trying to make sure my sister never got herself into trouble in there. I felt responsible if she got in to trouble so I tried my best to protect her. I felt she was too little.
65. There was a time when my sister [REDACTED], wrapped her peas in her napkin and threw it on the floor. Miss Fletcher must have seen the napkin, realised [REDACTED] was the only one without one and she pulled [REDACTED] out of her chair and made her stand and face the wall because she hadn't eaten her peas.
66. My wee granny was very good to us and my grandad had a good job. She would send us parcels of fruit, magazines and postal orders with £2 each. I think we got a letter from my granny every week and she tells me that within the letter would be a postal order. Fletcher would come into the dining room in the morning and shout out your name and hand you the letter. The letters were all opened but there was never a postal order that I saw.

67. There was a tuck shop there and the staff would look up a book and see if you had enough money and I think that's where the postal orders went. We were only allowed one packet of sweets a day or maybe it was a week and so there is no way we spent the value of the money we should have had. The staff must have kept it. I remember when I left one of the staff told me I had £2 left and I should buy my mum a box of chocolates for going home.
68. There were lots of girls there, but we weren't encouraged to talk to others or make friends. If you did, the staff would just shout at us. It felt like they constantly shouted at us.
69. We went on long walks every day. There were little wooden boxes that had wellington boots and jackets inside. We'd have to put both on and sometimes the wellies were too big or too small. They walked us for miles in the countryside through mud paths and up hills. All of the little ones would be trailing behind because it was too much for them. One day when we were out the snow was up to our knees. I was frozen and my feet were really sore. We walked past a dead sheep which was all frozen over. I remember the other little girls were all crying because they had seen this but Robertson was just saying, "Cmon, c'mon, hurry up." We were just marched back to the house. That's what the walks were, like a march. There was nothing about looking at the scenery or the flowers or plants and farm machinery and learning from it. The walks were longer than an hour and seemed to last ages.

Leaving Fornethy residential School, Kilry, Blairgowrie

70. I knew we were only going to be at Fornethy for six weeks, but it felt like forever. I would count the days down for home time and wish that each day was time for going home.
71. The day that I finally got on the bus to go home I was so relieved. I couldn't wait to get there. My wee granny was waiting for us when we arrived.

72. My sister and I did not return to our previous one-bedroom tenement flat but instead went to a house. It meant we were then able to share a bedroom, and my brothers had their own room, as did my parents. There was also a bathroom.
73. I think we told my granny some of the things that had gone on but I don't think we told my mum that much. We might have said it was terrible and they made us do this and that, but they probably would have said, "That that was a shame" and to just get on with it. Even to this day my mum says we never told her. I think I put it all to the back of my mind. As you go through life other things happen and you put it in this cupboard.

Life after being in care

74. Because my family had moved to Castlemilk, I went to a different school. I remember I was in primary five. With the move and going to different schools I always felt a little bit behind at school. I was really quiet at school too.
75. I then went to secondary school and I was bullied there for being quiet. I left school at sixteen years old and went straight into a Youth Opportunity Programme in a lighting shop. I ended up working there for two years. After that I went on to do a college course in various things including painting and decorating. I was only on the course for about eight weeks when I saw an advert for another lighting company and I applied for that. They were looking for someone over thirty-five years old and for a part time role. I was only eighteen and I wanted a full-time job. They took me on for a two-week trial and during that time I was asked to put together a large chandelier as no one else could do it. I was able to do it from what I had learnt in my previous role. I was told there and then I had the job. I stayed with them for eighteen years and became manageress initially and then became the buyer for them.
76. I have two grown up sons, one who is twenty eight years old and has a job as an accountant for the NHS. The other is nineteen. He is still at home and doing a mechanical engineering apprenticeship. They are both doing really well. For what I could afford I would say they have had a privileged life.

Impact

77. In my twenties and thirties I did start to get flashbacks about the incident with the male. One of the first times was when the Madeline McCann disappearance was in the news.
78. With all of this in the news about Fornethy, it's also triggered my memories of there. The cupboard in my mind opened up and it made me think. I have wondered if things that I have to deal with in my life had anything to do with it. For instance, my weight and also because I have been on anti-depressants for most of my life for depression.
79. I do think both of these traumatic things, with the male and Fornethy have had a physical and mental effect on me. I was already withdrawn, quiet and scared from the incident with the male, then going to Fornethy and being constantly scared there added to the fear in my life. I thought I had been going to Fornethy for a holiday, but it was hell and it was more trouble on the troubles I was already carrying. I also kept it all in.
80. I was very protective of my sons as they grew up and did everything I could to make them safe. I took them everywhere with me and did everything I could for them. I think that is down to the incident with the male as opposed to Fornethy. My oldest son, before he moved out, recently thanked me for everything I had done for him and I really appreciated that.
81. I do have friends from a long time ago, but it does take me a while to trust people. I was nervous about coming to speak to the Inquiry. Even with appointments at hospitals I usually look to get a second opinion because of my lack of trust.
82. I have confidence issues, I was on a course a few years ago and that helped.
83. I think that my overall feeling about Fornethy at the time was that it was a horrible experience but that I just wanted to forget about it, not talk about it and put it to the

back of my mind. The trouble now is, it's when it all comes out and is spoken about and you look up pictures and one sees Robertson in the news, it brings it all back.

84. It's all really sad. Fletcher and Robertson must have been quite young when they were supposed to be looking after children and I just wonder how at their young age they could treat children the way they did.

Treatment/support

85. I have been on anti-depressants for years, but I mostly put that down to life in general and how I have felt over the years. I don't necessarily draw a link with Fornethy with that, I feel it happened so many years ago and I was only young, but it could well have something to do with it.
86. I think I went to counselling about the incident with the male. The only thing I remember about it was that it was good to talk to someone about it that didn't know me, as opposed to my family. I think I was referred by my GP.

Reporting of Abuse

87. My sister and I have spoken a lot about Fornethy, especially after the trial with Robertson. My sister phoned me after she saw it on the news and I'm sure her words were, "Did you see that old bitch in the news, she's evil looking". We both agreed Robertson still looked the same. I also saw the survivors protesting [REDACTED]. I've looked at old photographs on Google of the home and I could see places we played and the old windows on the first floor where the dormitories were. On the back of all of that I contacted Thompsons Solicitors. My understanding is that Thompsons will try to get compensation for people who stayed at Fornethy. For me it was about giving my side of the story.

88. I also contacted the Inquiry around that time. I was a bit reluctant as when I think of abuse I think of sexual abuse.
89. I have since shared what happened to me there with my oldest son. My sister and I have also spoken about it in depth with my mum. She has said that had she known, she wouldn't have sent us there. My mum said as far as she knew we were being offered a holiday. As a result, my mum feels really bad about it now. I have tried to explain that there was no way she would have known [Secondary Institutions - to be published later]
[Secondary Institutions - to be published later] My two brothers also went away when they were about ten years old to a home at Seamill. [Secondary Institutions - to be published later]
90. My sister has no intentions of speaking to anyone about Fornethy.
91. Since speaking to the Inquiry I have now spoken to the Police and given them a statement about my experience at Fornethy.

Records

92. Thompsons have tried to get records from Fornethy but apparently they are struggling as there was a fire or something. I'm not really sure where they are with that.
93. I have tried to get my medical records, but they only go back to 1975. I may try through the health board.

Lessons to be Learned

94. Staff who work with children need to be well vetted. I don't know who employed the staff at Fornethy or if they were even vetted. There are too many horror stories from years ago in homes.

95. I think what would have made our stay better was if we had sat down at a table with the other girls. Maybe if we'd done an activity we could have chatted and had a laugh together, but instead we were too scared. We also had nothing to do except play outside in the snow.

96.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

97. I don't think having someone at Fornethy for us to speak to would have made a difference. I probably wouldn't have spoken to them because I was so quiet and withdrawn anyway.

Hopes for the Inquiry

98. I just wanted to come and tell my story because there are so many different stories. I want people to know about what went on in these places and what happened to me.

Other information

99. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the Inquiry. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed.....

RLS

Dated.....

29/4/26